

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NICOSI 02669 061036Z

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DEPT PLEASE PASS SECRETARY

FROM HOUGHTON AND MACK

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR LE

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH SARKIS

REF: (A) STATE 215513, (B) NICOSIA 2545

SUMMARY AND COMMENT:

SARKIS EXPRESSED DETERMINATION TO WORK WITH SYRIANS, OURSELVES AND THE VARIOUS LEBANESE PARTIES FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT. HE IS WARY OF THE MILITANT AIMS OF SOME CHRISTIAN LEADERS AND NOT COMPLETELY SURE OF SYRIAN OBJECTIVES. HE ASKED THAT WE INCREASE OUR EFFORTS TO HELP INSURE THAT LEBANON HAS SOME KIND OF CENTRAL AUTHORITY ON SEPTEMBER 23. SARKIS APPEARS INTELLECTUALLY AND EMOTIONALLY PREPARED FOR THE TASKS AHEAD.

1. PRESIDENT SARKIS RECEIVED US IN HIS HOME ON SEPT 4. AS I CAREFULLY WENT OVER MY TALKING POINTS HE TOOK NOTES AND INTERRUPTED ME FROM TIME TO TIME TO REPEAT KEY PASSAGES. SARKIS UNDERSTANDS OUR ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION, AND SHARES THE ESSENTIAL POINTS. HE SEEMED TO FASTEN MOST STRONGLY ONTO OUR WILLINGNESS TO SUPPORT SYRIAN EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT. HE NOTED A GENERAL
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 NICOSI 02669 061036Z

SIMILARITY OF VIEWS AMONG SYRIA, THE US AND HIMSELF BUT

WANTED TO KNOW WHAT CONCRETE STEPS CAN BE TAKEN BY EACH OF THE THREE PARTIES. COULD THERE NOT BE SOME COORDINATION TO ASSURE THAT WE FOLLOW THE SAME ROUTE TO THE SAME ENDS?

2. WHILE IN DAMASCUS, SAID SARKIS, HE HAD DISCUSSED HOW TO OBTAIN A POLITICAL PEACE. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE ATTITUDE OF SYRIA HAS GREAT WEIGHT, NOTING THAT THE SYRIANS PLAN TO SEE GEMAYEL AND CHAMOUN IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS. HE SAID THAT SOME CHRISTIAN LEADERS DO NOT FAVOR A PEACEFUL SOLUTION BUT THAT "IT SEEMED TO HIM" THAT THE SYRIANS DID. IN RESPONSE TO OUR QUESTION HE REPLIED THAT THE SYRIANS HAVE NO PROBLEM WITH THE CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE PHALANGE AND THE PALESTINIANS. SARKIS SAID HE ASKED ASAD DIRECTLY WHAT WERE SYRIA'S LONG-RANGE MOTIVES. ASAD REPLIED THAT IT WAS TO HELP RESTORE THE AUTHORITY OF THE LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT. WHEN THIS WAS DONE, SYRIAN FORCES WOULD WITHDRAW FROM LEBANESE TERRITORY. SARKIS DID NOT SAY WHETHER HE FULLY ACCEPTED THIS PLEDGE, REALIZING AS HE DID THAT SYRIA WOULD PURSUE ITS OWN INTERESTS.

3. SARKIS ESPOUSED A "TRANSITIONAL SOLUTION" OF THE PALESTINIAN-LEBANESE DISPUTE. HE BELIEVES THAT LEBANON CANNOT LIVE AT PERMANENT PEACE WITH THE PALESTINIANS UNTIL THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM IS SOLVED IN THE CONTEXT OF AN OVERALL MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT. DESPITE THE DIFFICULTY OF GETTING THE CHRISTIANS TO ACCEPT A PROVISIONAL ACCORD WITH THE PALESTINIANS, HE BELIEVES THAT THE URGENCY OF THE SITUATION REQUIRES THAT HE INSIST UPON SUCH A STEP. HE AGREES WITH OUR IMPLIED VIEW THAT SINCE THE PRESENT SITUATION IS RELATIVELY FAVORABLE TO THE CHRISTIANS BUT MIGHT REVERSE ITSELF, NOW IS THE BEST TIME FOR SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS.

4. THE PRESENT PHALANGE-FATAH NEGOTIATIONS, SAID SARKIS, SHOW ENCOURAGING PROGRESS WITH AT LEAST ONE WING OF FATAH. HE FEARS, HOWEVER, THAT FRANGIEH AND CHAMOUN WILL MAKE UNACCEPTABLE DEMANDS FOR A TOO-STRICT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAIRO ACCORDS. FURTHERMORE, THE ABSENCE OF ANY ASSURANCE THAT THE PALESTINIANS WILL KEEP THEIR WORD DOES NOT

SECRET

PAGE 03 NICOSI 02669 061036Z

ENCOURAGE CHRISTIAN FLEXIBILITY. THE SYRIAN PLEDGES TO BOTH SIDES IN THE BAABDA AGREEMENT WOULD HELP, BUT THE PLO HAS NEVER ACCEPTED SYRIA'S ROLE AS GUARANTOR OF A PALESTINIAN-MARONITE AGREEMENT.

5. AFTER A POLITICAL ACCORD AMONG THE PARTIES, IT WOULD BECOME POSSIBLE IN SARKIS' VIEW TO REESTABLISH A LEBANESE ARMY AND OTHER ELEMENTS OF A CENTRAL AUTHORITY,

AND HE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGED OUR OFFER OF ASSISTANCE AFTER A POLITICAL SOLUTION WAS FOUND. FOR A TRANSITIONAL MILITARY FORCE HE ENVISAGED SOME KIND OF JOINT COMMEND OVER THE RIVAL SECURITY FORCES. WITH RESPECT TO NAMING A NEW CABINET, SARKIS SAID THAT IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT CIRCUMSTANCES MIGHT MAKE IT NECESSARY TO SIMPLY ASK KARAME AND THE OTHER MINISTERS TO REMAIN IN OFFICE.

6. WE TOLD SARKIS THAT IF HE WISHED TO SEND AN ENVOY TO WASHINGTON AFTER HE WAS INSTALLED AS PRESIDENT, THE ENVOY WOULD BE WARMLY RECEIVED. SARKIS APPRECIATED THIS AND SAID THAT IF HE DECIDED TO DO SO HE WOULD GET IN TOUCH WITH EMBASSY BEIRUT. SARKIS CLOSED WITH THE REQUEST THAT WE INCREASE OUR EFFORTS IN CONTACTS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES TO HELP INSURE THERE WILL BE A CENTRAL AUTHORITY ON SEPTEMBER 23. IF THAT DATE WERE TO PASS WITHOUT SUCCESS, THE TASK OF REUNITING LEBANON WOULD BECOME ALL THE MORE DIFFICULT.

7. COMMENT:

SARKIS IS PAINFULLY AWARE OF THE ENORMOUS TASK HE HAS SHOULDERED. ON THE OTHER HAND HE SEEMS DETERMINED TO MAKE HIS ASSUMPTION OF OFFICE THE BEGINNING OF THE PROCESS OF REUNIFICATION. HE IS ENCOURAGED BY HIS TALKS WITH ASAD. SARKIS IS ALSO CONFIDENT THAT BECAUSE OF HIS RECOGNIZED POSITION OF NEUTRALITY AMONG THE VARIOUS PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT, HE IS THE LEBANESE LEADER WHO HAS A CHANCE OF RESTORING A UNIFIED COUNTRY.
DILLERY

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED SECRETARY.

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